

Vietnam: How Nixon Plans to Win the War



FOR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW the war in Indochina has been in a cryptic phase. On the one hand, there is no apparent slackening in the Nixon Administration's determination to "win" in Vietnam; on the other, in the cities of Vietnam the most important peace push in years has gathered strength, with the forbearance—perhaps even the blessing—of White House strategists.

On September 21, a rich landowner and prominent anti-Communist member of the South Vietnamese Assembly, Ngo Cong Duc, made a dramatic proposal for peace which has become the central document of the new peace coalition. The basic demands of the vast majority of the Vietnamese people, said Duc, are "the withdrawal of all American and foreign troops from South Vietnam . . . [and] an immediate cessation of the war, in order to permit the Vietnamese to work out their problems themselves." Duc emphasized that his supporters were opposed to the "communization" of South Vietnam but were willing to take their chances with the Communists rather than allow their country to be obliterated by an endless war. Duc called for the Paris peace talks to include a delegation of non-Communist forces, with the idea that the enlarged conference could establish a neutralist government in South Vietnam which could hold free elections. (In Saigon, Duc's proposal was publicly acclaimed

by his active supporters—the Buddhist movement, the students and faculty of the universities, the war victims, the women's movement, even moderate Catholics.)

One of the most intriguing developments of the new political situation is that these peace forces appear to be coalescing for the first time around former General Duong Van Minh ("Big Minh"), who in 1963, apparently as the CIA's protégé, overthrew Diem in the first generals' coup. Minh recently announced his candidacy for the 1971 elections, while Thieu has indicated that he will not run again. Even more intriguing is that the Duc proposal and Minh's candidacy seem to have the tacit approval of the NLF and the DRV, while in the U.S. the Duc statement has been praised by Renie Davis of the Chicago Conspiracy as "the way to end the war."

This unusual convergence of forces in part reflects a transitional stage in the struggle, a jockeying for positions in anticipation of the next phase. Evidently the NLF is confident of its political strength for any contest in which the contenders are Vietnamese, with the U.S. troops and B-52s reasonably withdrawn from the scene. But what can explain the Nixon Administration's own willingness to encourage such developments, particularly when there is no evidence that there has been any abandonment in Washington of the